



Progress Report to the President
on the

american heritage
RIVERS

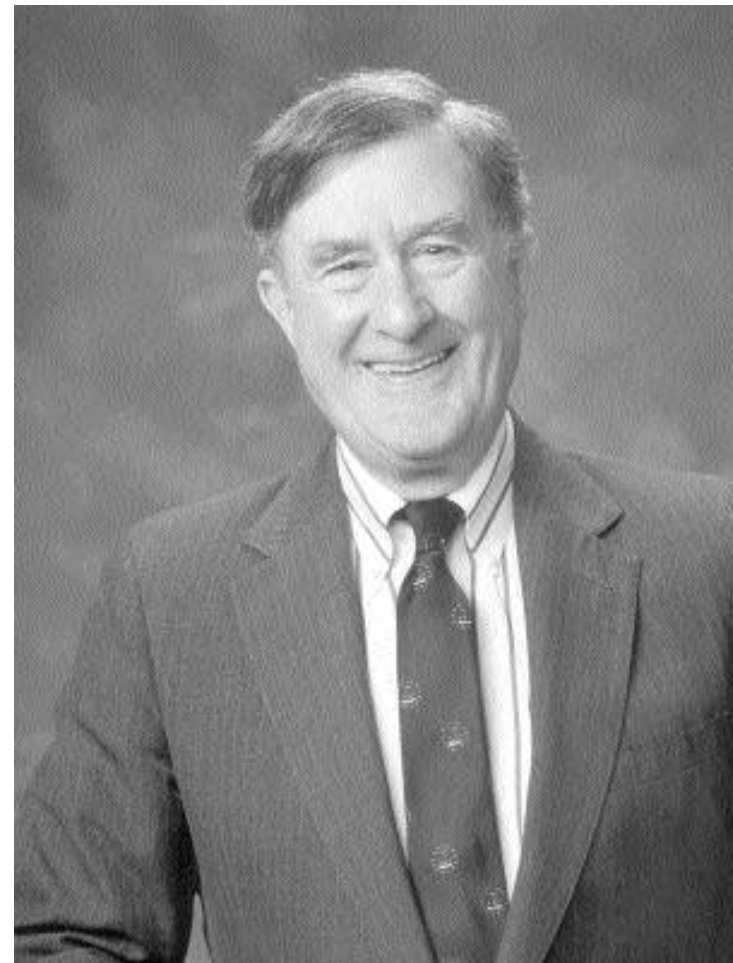
Initiative

Dedication to Senator John Chafee and Representative Bruce Vento

Within the past two years, the Nation lost two outstanding public servants and statesmen: Senator John Chafee of Rhode Island and Representative Bruce Vento of Minnesota. Both men were visionaries who shared this Administration's belief that America can protect and preserve its historical and natural treasures while expanding economic prosperity. Both men made a point of working across party lines and beyond political boundaries to raise the visibility of issues affecting all river communities.

Future generations of Americans will benefit from their legislative legacies.

We dedicate this publication to their memory.



Senator John Chafee



Representative Bruce Vento

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December, 2000

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The American Heritage River Initiative has faced numerous challenges since you conceived of this unique partnership between the federal government and local communities. We were fortunate to have many strong champions of the initiative itself and the goals it represents. Within the past two years, our nation lost two such champions and outstanding statesmen: Senator John Chafee of Rhode Island and Representative Bruce Vento of Minnesota.

Senator Chafee joined me in co-founding the American Heritage Rivers Congressional Caucus because he shared your vision of protecting and preserving our historical and natural treasures while expanding economic opportunities. As the senior senator from Rhode Island, he recognized the importance of this program for his beloved Blackstone-Woonasquatucket rivers, of which he spoke often and eloquently. As a deeply committed environmentalist, he understood the importance of providing federal resources to locally-driven efforts for rivers across the nation.

Representative Vento helped to craft some of the most significant conservation legislation ever passed by the Congress, and his work lives on in our national parks, heritage areas, and wild and scenic rivers around the country. He also cared deeply about his hometown American Heritage River, the Mississippi, which flows through St. Paul.

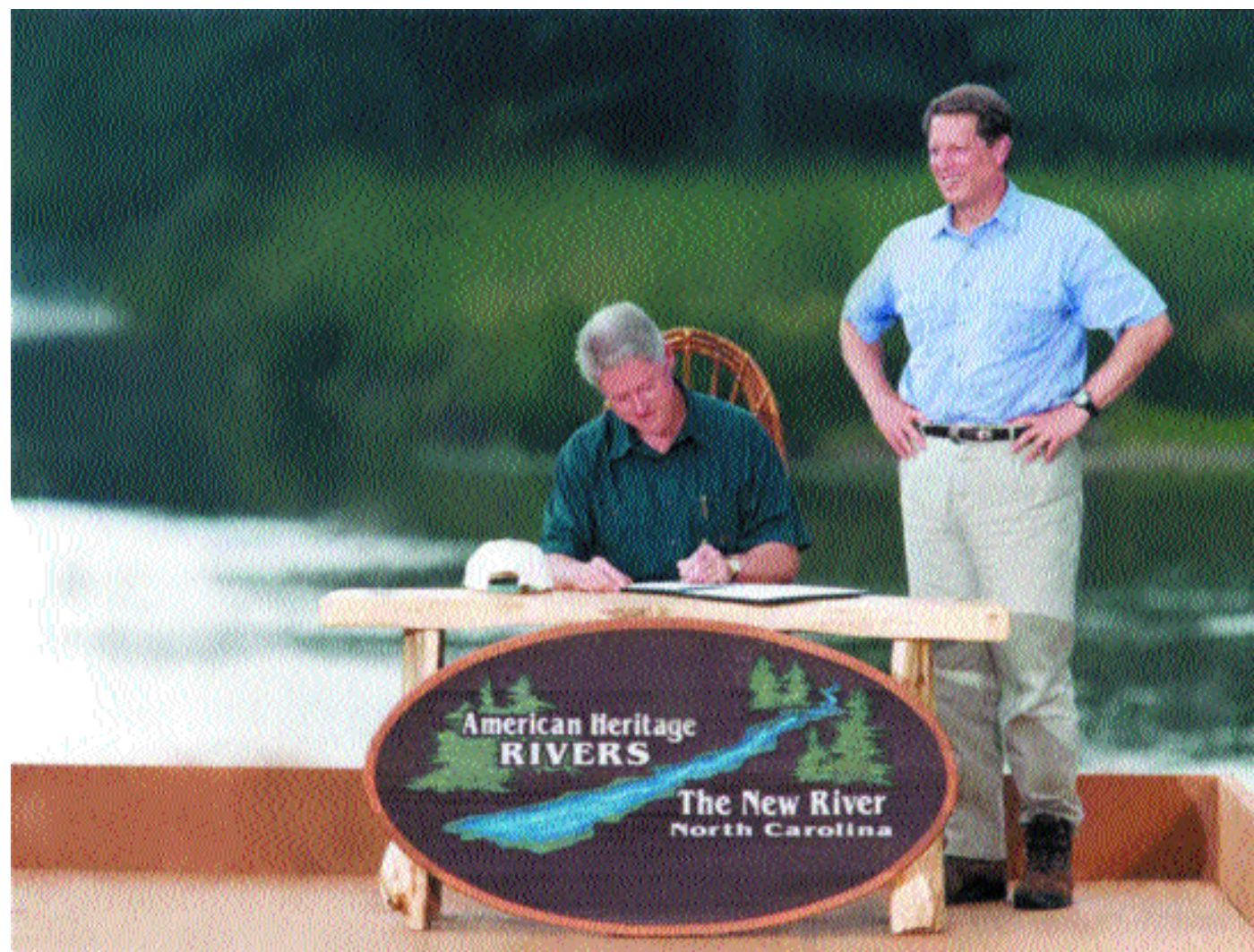
Both men rose above partisanship to find consensus on issues of long-term importance to our nation. Generations of future Americans owe a great debt of gratitude to the legacies of these fine legislators. It is to their vision and their memory that this publication is dedicated.

Sincerely,

Paul E. Kanjorski
Member of Congress

"...We are going to rededicate our country to restoring our river heritage and to reaffirm one of our oldest values, the importance of safeguarding our natural treasures for generations to come."

President William Jefferson Clinton



President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore in July 1998, announcing the first designations of American Heritage River, along the banks of the New River in North Carolina



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

December 5, 2000

President William J. Clinton
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear President Clinton:

On behalf of the American Heritage Rivers (AHR) communities, the AHR Interagency Committee, and the AHR Task Force, I am pleased to provide a Status Report on the American Heritage Rivers initiative. We have made significant progress in creating a new relationship between local communities and the federal government whereby the Federal government responds to local problems by offering coordinated assistance to communities, rather than imposing solutions from afar.

From our working rivers to slow-moving waters reaching the sea, this Administration has demonstrated through the AHR initiative that our rivers' legacy is our Nation's legacy. Spanning 25 States, designated or partially designated rivers cover approximately 2,783 river miles with over 54,178 square miles of watershed area. Our American Heritage Rivers have demonstrated we can revitalize our waterfronts while restoring the environment and its economy.

Each of these rivers represents work of dedicated Americans who share a belief that their river is vitally important not only to the local ecosystem, but to the local economy as well. We hope that the tremendous progress made for each of these rivers, and collectively, will serve as a model for hundreds of other communities searching for innovative ways to preserve their river heritage, revitalize their economy, and protect their natural environment.

The initiative has shown that adapting federal programs to serve local communities is not only doable, but is sharing a groundswell of increasing popularity. Communities across the Nation have requested the Administration to expand the initiative by designating an additional round of rivers. Other communities, who did not initially choose to participate, are now requesting to join the designated river communities in revitalizing their communities.

Indeed the initiative received requests for designation of 126 rivers throughout the country. While only 14 of the 126 rivers were designated, we continue to provide services to all river communities and link important databases for rivers everywhere. Valuable information and networks have been established across the Nation to provide key opportunities to address specific concerns. We have bridged partnerships with other river groups, universities, non-profits, private sector and other organizations, such as American Rivers, River Network, the Garden Club of America, and the National Historic Preservation groups.

The initiative begun by Executive Order 13061 focuses the federal government on responding to community needs. To fully realize the concepts and ideas embodied in the initiative, Congress will need to consider legislation to institutionalize the successes gained by these communities and the federal government in responding to those needs. Thus, Congress could enable and assist federal agencies in their attempts to be good neighbors and encourage them to continue working with local communities in a coordinated fashion to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and deliver much needed services to river communities nationwide.

Finally, I would like to note the extraordinary work done by so many dedicated people from across the country – the volunteers in the communities, the dedicated federal employees, and the architects of this initiative. Their hard work has proven that government can empower communities to realize great economic and environmental ends.

With Congress and the Administration working hand in hand, we can change the way we do business so that we are giving back what our rivers have given us. Our Nation's rivers are the backbone of American culture.

We are grateful to you and the Vice President for providing this opportunity to chart a new course where the federal government responds to communities and their efforts to restore their rivers, their economies, and their cultural and historic legacies. It is our hope that what we have begun will continue for the legacy of our Nation's great rivers.

Sincerely,

George T. Frampton Jr.

George T. Frampton, Jr.
Chair



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Our Nation's rivers flow for more than three million miles, connecting cities, homes, farms, and industries. Throughout history, these waterways have been a driving current, launching a robust economy for the Nation and providing sustenance for generations of Americans. Rapid changes in industry and commerce, and the concomitant effects of pollution reduced the quality for many of our Nation's river communities. The American Heritage Rivers initiative, which the President established in 1997, is the federal government's most innovative and exciting step to date in – recognizing the importance of rivers to the Nation's environmental, social, and economic health, and in helping communities in innovative ways to reinvigorate their connections to the rivers that run through them.

Through this initiative, caring citizens and businesses have formed new partnerships. Together they have designed long-term goals and creative strategies to clean up their rivers and rejuvenate the areas that surround them. The Presidential designation, focused attention and federal resources have combined to help them leverage additional funding from other sources. These partnerships – recognized as models of how an active public, local businesses, and government agencies can make dramatic improvements – have engendered community pride in their past and a positive outlook for their future.

Broad achievements of the initiative:

INTEGRATING THE ECONOMY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

American Heritage River communities have demonstrated through their own, locally initiated projects that what is good for the environment is also good for the economy – a fundamental precept of this Administration's policies, which have contributed to the strongest economy in the Nation's history.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

With coordinated and focused federal assistance, provision of guidance, technical expertise and other resources, the initiative has brought new energy to longstanding local efforts to reclaim the health, heritage, and economic vitality of rivers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ELEVATING LOCAL CONCERNS TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

Through the American Heritage initiative, river communities have had the opportunity to receive high level focused federal attention and assistance. By forging agreements with communities, federal agencies were encouraged to cut red-tape wherever possible and to address community priorities, such as “Keystone” projects.

MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK BETTER AND COST LESS

By adopting a federal team approach with an emphasis on interagency coordination and greater cooperation, the American Heritage Rivers initiative optimized the delivery of many federal services to local communities. This team approach saves both the government and community partners valuable time and money.

Summary and Conclusions

This report describes in more detail the purpose and accomplishments of the American Heritage Rivers initiative. Along the way, both the federal agencies and the participating river communities learned a great deal from their experiences. They learned more about each other and developed new ways to solve problems together. Following is a summary of some of the lessons learned and opportunities that remain for consideration in the future.

1 A LITTLE CAN GO A LONG WAY

Communities often need modest funding, especially for smaller projects or for the initial stages of larger projects. As the American Heritage Rivers initiative demonstrated, the federal government needs better delivery systems to address community needs. This may include a greater level of flexibility in federal procedures for grants, contracts and cooperative agreements. In some cases, it may involve modest philosophical changes to government procurement practices that are within the discretion of the agency.

2 MORE KNOWLEDGE IS NEEDED

Many rivers and river communities lack an up-to-date understanding of the science and dynamics of rivers and of the cultural history that surrounds them. This can hamper efforts to improve water quality and to revitalize the river communities. It also leads to mistrust about motives for changes. To maintain these great river resources more effectively and productively, a greater level of understanding is required. More scientific studies. More monitoring and evaluation. More historical inventories and archaeological investigations. The results of this work must then be shared not only with managers and government officials but also with the public, the taxpayers who ultimately will sway future decisions about what happens to our Nation’s rivers.

3 THERE'S NO ONE WAY TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

From its outset, the American Heritage Rivers initiative has been an example of ingenuity in action. Instead of providing a new and separate source of federal funds, it was premised on using existing federal programs. It had few models to guide it, but sprang from the simple but creative conviction that government can work better and be more responsive to communities. A variety of agencies were involved, bringing with them a wide array of economic development, environmental and cultural preservation tools. Even the community partners differed from river to river, some coming from the private sector, others from local or state agencies. Each River Navigator also brought a unique blend of talents and experience, along with the different resources of their sponsoring agencies. All of these elements combined to help make the American Heritage Rivers initiative successful.

4 PARTNERSHIPSTAKE WORK

Government and the private sector can work together, but it is, indeed, hard work. Their differences in missions and methods, goals and objectives, have often created high hurdles. On the other hand, "reinventing government" was launched long before the American Heritage Rivers initiative. Many government agencies and private groups were already beginning to work in new, collaborative ways. But it will still take time and effort to build the trust and create the mechanisms that can make this occur more smoothly in the future.

5 LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL

President Clinton provided the strong leadership that was needed to get the initiative going. Other leadership, in turn, came not only from people within the Administration, but also from Members of Congress, state and local government officials, tribal representatives and the private sector. Most important were the local leaders, the community partners who stepped forward and worked so hard to create their visions, define their plans, create their programs and implement their projects. Every success documented in this report has a human face on it. One key measure of success has been the great number of river communities still requesting to be designated.

6 OPEN COMMUNICATION IS KEY

From the beginning, both the creators and the implementers of the American Heritage Rivers initiative sought to communicate openly and often. A web site was established and all legal documents, lists of resources, contact information and updates on activities and events were publicly posted. Similarly a list serve was created, and information freely distributed. Training opportunities and meetings between community partners and River Navigators were open to the public. This also fulfilled one of the promises of the initiative, that all river communities can benefit from the initiative, not just those with the official AHR designation.

Looking Ahead

The experience with the American Heritage Rivers initiative over the last three years has been uplifting. The designated AHR rivers have undertaken outstanding projects to enhance the environment and quality of life in their communities. Many of the AHR's initial detractors have become ardent supporters of this new way for government to do business.

Some of the difficulties encountered by the initiative in fully realizing its potential are structural in nature. With an eye toward building a broad multi-agency, multi-disciplinary team of federal experts, the initiative was housed under the Council on Environmental Quality. While offering some benefits in getting the initiative started, it may not be the ideal permanent home. Nevertheless, the integrated team structure has been helpful to river communities by cutting bureaucratic red-tape, reducing the possibility of redundant efforts, and increasing the level and quality of service.

Unfortunately, the success of some projects has been slow because many federal programs remain under-funded, while others tend to change from one Administration to the next. Many of the agencies were forth-coming and resourceful in dedicating various resources to AHR communities. For example, The EPA provided four River Navigator positions and a

representative to the Task Force. Likewise, the Department of Interior, Department of Transportation, Department of Energy, Forest Service, Corps of Engineers, and Natural Resources Conservation Service were very helpful in providing the needed professionals to work with communities.

Others were forthcoming in their responsiveness toward fulfilling community needs, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Under "Project Impact," FEMA provided assistance to the Rio Grande, Connecticut, Potomac, New, and St. John's Rivers, to help communities become "disaster resistant." The Economic Development Administration, through its grant programs and technical assistance, showed the most flexibility in realizing the vision of communities by giving economically depressed areas the means to improve their local economies along with great flexibility to "get things done."

Not all projects required direct funding. Many required "sweat equity" and resourcefulness. Many agencies provided needed technical assistance, office space or equipment, or volunteers. Because of the high level of interest at the Department of Transportation, the Coast Guard was able to elevate the priority of several projects on the Hudson River that required complex land exchanges. The AmeriCorps took the lead in contacting all of the river communities to encourage them to use volunteer work forces and other assistance through their national service network. An excellent example of technical assistance was an interagency effort to provide support for a "soft engineering" project along the shoreline of the Detroit River.

To create more flexibility and address other structural issues may require legislation, which could also confer both Congressional and Executive authorization for the overarching goals and objectives of the initiative. Such legislation could also provide for establishment of a River Community Conservation Foundation, patterned after other Congressionally chartered nonprofit organizations, such as the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The proposed Foundation could provide needed federal funding for community-driven projects and have the ability to match private sector funds. To continue the important work these river communities have begun, the new Congress and the new Administration should look to build on the progress and public approval to date, and establish and authorize a Foundation that supports the work of this community-based initiative. Citizens and businesses as well as local elected officials have invested a tremendous amount of time, talent, public and private financial resources, but the environmental and economic challenges they are confronted with locally are also of national importance.

The People of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative

"In each and every community that won this designation – and, I add, those who came close – and there were dozens of them – we were simply overwhelmed by the cooperation between interests who often disagree, and by the creative but practical plans forged by communities for protecting natural resources, spurring revitalization of the economy, and preserving cultural heritage. Now we intend to work with you to realize our plans. This is the beginning, not the end..."

President William Jefferson Clinton
July 30, 1998

When the President announced the initiative in 1997, he was responding to concerns expressed by ordinary citizens – from shopkeeper to sportsmen – in conversations he and members of his cabinet had as they traveled around the country, and in letters. Many of those people – and many more since – have transformed those expressions of concern into positive action to improve the quality of life for themselves and their neighbors in river communities across the country. Their American Heritage Rivers initiative has instilled community pride, invigorated their efforts to restore their environment and revitalize their regional economies, and renewed their culture while preserving their historic past. The people of the

American Heritage Rivers initiative reflect credit on their communities and on public service.

A very special "thanks" goes to Kathleen McGinty, Wesley Warren, Ray Clark, Karen Hobbs, and Loretta Neumann, who were the visionaries behind the initiative. Many other people from all walks of life are the American Heritage Rivers initiative.

Community Partners

Michael Creasey – Blackstone/Woonasquatucket
Jane Sherman – Blackstone/Woonasquatucket
Sharon Francis – Connecticut
Whitty Sanford – Connecticut
Kay Carlson – Cuyahoga
Ted Esborn – Cuyahoga
Mark Breederland – Detroit
Peter Stroh – Detroit
Michael Kito – Hanalei
John Cahill – Hudson
Eileen Murphy – Hudson
Governor George Pataki – Hudson
Cindy Buchanan – Lower Mississippi
Linda S. Calvert – Lower Mississippi
Nathan Champagne – Lower Mississippi
Angela Falgoust – Lower Mississippi
Bob Tannen – Lower Mississippi
Hon. Robert Moloney – Upper Mississippi
Patrick Woodie – New
Jim Byrne – New
Mikki Sager – New
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Governor John Kitzhaber – Willamette
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Miguel Flores – Rio Grande
Alex Rogers – Upper Susquehanna/Lackawanna
Paul Jeske – Willamette
Capt. Robert Innes (USCG) – Lower Mississippi
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Ben Borda – New
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Jan Surface – Hanalei
Carol Wilcox – Hanalei
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Congressional River Caucus

The late Senator John Chafee, RI – Co-Chair
Representative Paul Kanjorski, PA – Co-Chair
Senator Lincoln Chafee, RI – Co-Chair

Nominated River Partners

Becky Champion – Chattahoochee
Ella Fillipone – Passaic
Chuck Pezeski – Clearwater
Jamie Wright – Puyallup
Judge Buddy Villanes – Arkansas

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Robert Benson
Leigh Dunkelburger
John McShane
Loretta Neumann

And all others who assisted with the initiative,
especially to the people who live along the rivers.